

sight, coming at a hard gallop down the street. Opposite her coach the rider reined in his lathered horse. A cry broke from Mavis's lips:

"Kane!"

He looked up at her from under the brim of his hat, his eyes fierce and bright in his dark face. But he spoke no word, sitting there a silent, grim figure on his panting horse. She wondered why he had come, since he did not speak even her name nor good-by.

Suddenly she leaned out of the window. "Good-by, Kane," she said.

He lifted his hat then and bowed, an ironical smile twitching his lips. Was he thinking, as she was, how she had come a bride to the station ten years before? She had clung to him, and the promise of all protection lay in his strong young arm.

And, thus remembering, the world of sunset was blurred out, and with it the silent, still figure of Malloy. And, unheeded by her, the train began to move with rattle and clank and roll.

She sprang up in a sort of wild surprise and alarm, and ran the length of the car to the door. The conductor, swinging it shut, looked at her in disapproval.

"I've—I've forgotten something," she stammered. "I'm sorry, but I've got to—go back."

"It's too late," he said coldly. "You'll have to wait till you get to the next station."

She went back to her place, and leaned out as far as she dared from the window. But the train was flying east now, and Corwin was a dim spot on the plain's center. She sat down and began pulling at her veil with fingers that soon ceased their trembling.

"It's too late," she thought dully. "It's too late!"

THE orchestra was playing in the palm-room, and the wild Hungarian air translated itself into supreme loveliness and sorrow to Mavis's ears. She sat with Tommy Eversley at a table in a secluded corner. Down the aisle she could glimpse now and then her Aunt Julia's bare white shoulders, or catch the flash of the jewel in her hair as she nodded smilingly to some newcomer. Mavis sat listening, her hands lying tense in her lap. The blood beat in her throat in a sort of ecstasy.

She became aware of Tommy's eyes staring at her from between his puffy lids. "Gad, how you must have missed it all, Mavis! Your face looks like Ellen Terry's in—what? Ophelia?"

Mavis, roused from her dream, laughed tremulously.

"Oh, you can't know—you couldn't guess! There's the music now—"

Tommy's brows went up. He turned an indifferent glance upon the musicians.

"Awful!" he said grumpily. "Next time we'll go to Tony's. Cabaret place, y' know—lobsters and truffles on the side. Tell me about Kane," he demanded.

"Good old Kane! I bear him a grudge for taking you away from me, but tell me. We have been hearing how he's made the desert blossom, y' know. Gad, how I wish I were in his shoes!"

"You?" Mavis said.

The faint intonation of sarcastic surprise stung the color into Tommy's cheeks.

"I guess we do look pretty rotten to you after ten years out there where they do things. Oh, some of us do things back here; but little Tommy's a lily of the field who can't even buy a bond without it turning out a gold brick. I know how to spend, that's all, and after a while a fellow gets tired of spending and getting in return nothing but a dark-colored taste in his mouth. I wanted to go when Kane went, but I hadn't the ginger. I'd have been a failure there—a quitter; and I hate a quitter. That's why I've such a distaste for my own society."

Mavis had risen. Tommy saw that her face was pale and tired.

"Going? All right. It's early, but I forget you've been away from the bright night lights so long. But you haven't told me of Kane."

"Some other time," she said indistinctly. "Aunt Julia's waiting."

Why, she asked herself bitterly that

night, did every one want to talk to her of Kane, quite as if Kane had financed a revolution or set up an empire? Kane had done no more than thousands of other men all over the Southwest. In what way was a man superior to his kind who declines to live among them, and who elects to spend his days among cow-boys and long-haired Mexicans?

Resentment enveloping her like a torturing garment, Mavis turned off the lights and lifted the shade to let in the fugitive moonlight. Then, with the remembrance that this was New York and not New Mexico, she drew the shade and crept into bed. She lay there wide awake, the darkness oppressing her. The once familiar noises of the Avenue now came up disturbing, alien, and the far-away roar of the elevated drummed too heavily on ears grown used to no sound at night but the wind of the plains.

HER hour of ecstasy had passed. Over her crept at last the certainty, growing slowly through the days, that she had ceased to be all that she once was. Ten years had wrenched her, root and branch, out of the old life, and the fibers of her being had refused to be transplanted into the new.

A month had passed since she had first set foot, dust-worn and shabby, in her Aunt Julia's drawing-room. Since then, if her days had not been full, the fault had not been with Aunt Julia. There were endless rounds of visits to the manicure, the milliner, the costumer.

With amiable serenity Mrs. Ryburn waved away Mavis's protests as to the cost.

"This is my particular treat. You poor child, life owes you something for those ten years!"

But, lying there in the darkness, Mavis recalled that look she surprised sometimes on Aunt Julia's face—when, for instance, interested friends persisted in talking to her of Kane, and asking when Mavis would return, and why Kane had not come, too? The look was always veiled quickly by Aunt Julia's dropped lids, but its hard, cynical amusement rasped on some raw nerve in Mavis's soul.

WHEN Mrs. Ryburn announced placidly one morning that they would leave that afternoon for her summer home on Long Island, Mavis flushed with pleasure. She had always loved the place because the water was near. On their first night there, a summer storm came up, and, lulled by the ruffled waters of the Sound and the rushing wind, Mavis fell asleep. She slept long and late—and went down to find her aunt home for luncheon from a cross-country drive, and Isabel Jerome with her.

For ten years Isabel had haunted Mavis's memory like a half-forgotten phantom. Once Kane and Isabel had been sweethearts. They were distantly akin, and the family had expected them to marry. Mavis knew that Kane's relatives had suffered a shock of surprise and disappointment when Kane had married her instead. Now, suddenly visualized, the phantom appeared—no apparition at all, but very beautiful flesh and blood. A quick color sprang to Mavis's face as she gave Isabel her hand.

"Why didn't you bring Kane with you?" Isabel said. "Or is he joined to his idols?"

"Kane has never wanted to come back," Mavis said coldly. She did not explain that there had been no time in all the years when he could have come.

Isabel drew off her gloves.

"The life absorbs one. I know about it—a little—from friends out there. They are friends of Kane's, too—the Livingstones."

Mavis looked at her swiftly.

"They are forty miles from us, on the other side of the cañon. I do not know them very well."

"They are worth knowing," Isabel said quietly. "You remember Betty Travis?"

"No," Mavis said. "I've heard of her, I think."

"She and Cleve Livingstone had been married a year when the doctors found that Cleve had tuberculosis and ordered

him West. Cleve's money had gone, like Kane's, in the failure of the Randall Trust Company, and it was little enough they had to go West on, poor children. I have never had the full story from Betty. There are things women won't tell. But, looking at her face now, one can guess at the tragedy of those awful first lean years. When Betty came back to us for the first time last year, her eyes had that look, indelible, unforgettable—the look of memory. But there was something else, too, in her face, that made one glad to see it, and that was—victory."

"Victory," Mavis said slowly, a dull fire in her agate-colored eyes. "Over what?"

Some latent astonishment was manifest in Isabel's face. "You, as Kane's wife, ought to know what life there means—at the first."

"Oh, I know!" Mavis laughed suddenly. With an impatient gesture, she took up a rose Isabel had laid upon the table and began tearing it apart, petal by petal. "I know," she said again.

There was a silence, broken by neither. Mrs. Ryburn leaned back in her chair, her glance playing lightly, smilingly, from one to the other. Isabel leaned forward.

"Do you women of the plains never look back on us here—and pity us? Or guess how some of us envy you the bargain life's made with you?"

"Bargain!" Mavis said. "Do you ever consider the price we pay?"

"We pay, too," Isabel said gently. "But at the end your days, your hands, are full. And ours are empty. That is the difference."

When her aunt and Isabel had gone out again, Mavis went down alone to the shore, where a long, low line of cliffs sprang up from the sands. She flung herself down on the bracken, and lay staring out at the purple waters. There was no reason why her thoughts should revert so persistently to Kane. Her manner of leaving him, his bitter, contemptuous arraignment of her, had snapped asunder any lost links of love the old years had forged for them. The word with which he had branded her, that false word—"quitter"! Had she not the right to choose her own way and life, as Kane had?

And still the vision of Kane's fagged face and haggard eyes swam before her. Even the sea held the color of his eyes—dark purple, with the tawny under-color, those wistful, entreating eyes of Kane!

In an upflash of rage at her own vacillation and useless retrospection, Mavis fled back to the house and called up Tommy Eversley.

TOMMY came down promptly. After dinner he and Mavis motored up to town to the theater and supper afterward. And on the homeward way, being a bit dazed by her high spirits (and perhaps by other spirits as bubbling and much more confusing to a small-caliber brain like Tommy's), he tried to kiss her, and—

White and shaking with rage and loathing, Mavis descended from the car and ran up to her room. She switched on the lights—and confronted her aunt, sitting beside the window and evidently waiting for her.

"Mason told me you had gone into town with Tommy Eversley. I meant to tell you there are safer men than Tommy in New York."

"I have discovered that," Mavis laughed shortly.

"Drunk?" her aunt said casually.

Mavis nodded. "And by now I hope he is dead."

A line appeared between Mrs. Ryburn's delicate brows.

"This isn't—ah—the West, you know. I hope there was no scene."

"There wasn't," Mavis replied. "I pushed him out of the car and told the chauffeur to drive on. He was quiet enough when he struck the ground."

"My dear Mavis!" her aunt protested. "You are primitive, if you don't know it. And—don't you think it better to be off with the old love before you are on with the new? You can't hedge about Kane always, you know."

The dark color dyed Mavis's face. She knew her aunt spoke the truth, but tonight the truth was the last thing Mavis wanted to hear. From the door Mrs. Ryburn looked back at her niece.

"Isabel had a letter from the Livingstones to-day. There's a baby, and they want her to come out for the christening. She's going Thursday."

She closed the door, to open it again almost immediately.

"I don't know whether it will interest you, but Kane has been having trouble with some Mexican squatters, and they burned some barns and shot him in the shoulder. Nothing serious, however."

The night was very still, with no sound from the sea except now and then the shriek of a tug or the long, far-off blast of a steamer. Over the plains, Mavis thought, the stars were gold in a sky of brilliant blackness, and about the stone house behind the pepper and eucalyptus trees the wind was whirling and rising and falling all night long.

And Kane was there alone.

Presently the cycle of her thoughts swung round to the squatter. It must have been Martinez. It was he who had stolen the sheep in the lower ranch, and when Malloy and his men were hot on the trail, had forsaken his spoil and fled to the foot-hills. There had been no absolute proof, but suspicion had clearly pointed to Martinez. If he had declared vendetta on Kane—

And Isabel was going out to the Southwest country—Isabel, who had wanted Kane!

And even Tommy Eversley hated a quitter.

IF Mrs. Ryburn was aware of undercurrents in Mavis's newly ordered existence, her placid air gave no hint of such suspicions. She managed this outing and that; she ordered clothes, and more clothes. She looked on with her sure smile as the tan and roughness vanished from Mavis's hair. She beheld Mavis with the bloom of girlhood given place to the full flower of womanhood—saw a beauty so long shadowed by sullen discontent respond like a flower to the sun.

July had gone and the August tides were flinging the seaweed on the sands. Mavis, coming in one afternoon with her skirts and loose blouse damp with the smell of the sea, found her aunt dressed for going out and impatiently waiting.

"Had you forgotten the matinee?"

"No," Mavis said. "I'm not going."

"Shall we drive over to Alice Bingham's for tea, then?"

"I don't want to go."

Mrs. Ryburn let asperity at last creep into her voice:

"Well, for heaven's sake, what do you want?"

"I want to go home," Mavis said.

"Why don't you go?" her aunt snapped.

"Because I'm a quitter."

"A—a—what? Oh, I think I understand." She sat down on the nearest chair. "Well?" she said.

"You see, I failed Kane. All the years he was toiling and fighting drought and desolation and loneliness, I was sulking. I was so busy being sorry for myself, I forgot—Kane. I hated the life. I wanted to come back—here. I thought I did, and now it's this I hate."

"You seem to be rather changeable in your opinions," her aunt said dryly.

"If I'd come back before now, I'd have got my perspective. Still, it seems to me I had as much right to choose our manner of life as Kane did."

"No," Julia Ryburn said. "Get that fool feminist notion out of your head. Kane was the bread-winner. He found his work and did it. Yours was there too, but you didn't do it. I don't mean you needed to sow and reap with your hands, but to stand by Kane as he did them, whether he failed or succeeded, whether he lived or starved. Few women can hope to marry men as fine as Kane Malloy."

Mavis's quick breaths were audible. Her aunt's inflexible voice went on:

"The silences, the desert, make men and women—or break them. The fittest survive, and beyond the borders of civiliza-